

Graham's Speech at Hal's Farewell Party

4 September 1986

It is a real privilege for me to be able to say a few words about Hal Ford with whom I have worked for nearly four years. I can think of few people -- Sherman Kent comes to mind -- so nearly synonymous with National Estimates as Hal Ford.

Hal has had a varied career. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] He has left this Agency twice before to teach and do research, but he has always been impelled to come back to the same line of work. Why? What's the attraction? Do real men really eat quiche and write National Estimates? What's this line of work really all about anyway?

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While thinking these issues over, I decided it would be appropriate to our times to do a pop-psychology profile of Hal [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] This instant psychological profile suggests to me that he feels a deep-seated need to challenge authority. He probably doesn't want to be President at this stage -- although he can look sufficiently Buddha-like on occasion to pass for Secretary of State. (That comes from his years in the Far East -- the Mandarin manner -- the Chinese self-effacing style.)

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But getting back to challenge of authority. As you all know, Hal's favorite word is "so-what." It's always "what's the so-what" of this Estimate. Why are we doing this? I sense that somewhere in his childhood

-- maybe not Russian-style swaddling-clothes frustration -- but something, forced Hal to develop this petulant "so-what" question that he puts to everybody and every Estimate he touches. "Come on -- eat your spinach -- its good for you." "So-what."

You may smile -- but let's push it farther. Think of the satisfaction of being able to turn to the Secretary of State's policies, the NSC's policies, the President's policies -- and say -- so-what? "So our troops are in Lebanon, Mr. President; so what?" "So you don't like Daniel Ortega's face, Mr. Shultz; so-what?"

I'm not an analyst by background, I'm an operations officer. But I really think I'm onto a new line of analysis here with Hal Ford -- and indeed in analyzing all the rest of the NIC and what keeps us going. Why else would we write estimates? Why else would we sit through tedious coordination sessions -- intellectual giants with the cosmic vision -- surrounded by pygmies -- and turkeys?

The answer is power. Chew up the Secretary of Defense for breakfast. Cut holes through the wimpish, snivelling, excuse for foreign policy that oozes out of the State Department. Suggest that the National Security Council advisor can't tell its Nicaragua from his elbow. Demonstrate brilliantly that SDI won't work and will fall out of the sky. -- Here, here

is where we begin to appreciate the real satisfaction of working on the NIC. "So-what, Mr. President" -- And we get paid for it. And get to put little seals of approval on our work at the hushed ceremonial halls of NFIB.

Now we begin to understand the deeper meaning and relevance of Hal Ford's so-what. It should be on the NIC-seal -- if we had one. In hoc signo vinces -- so-what. In God we trust - so-what. Anybody know how that comes out in Latin?

Hal is lucky he's living in a free society and a tolerant government -- one in which NIC challenges to the soundness-of-mind-of-the-policymaker, pale alongside the morning ravages of the Washington Post. Otherwise Hal would be in trouble.

Can you imagine in the Kremlin the same kind of scene?

Gorbachev talking to his chief of intelligence assessments?

Gorbachev: Comrade Ford, what is assessment of status of glorious revolution in Afghanistan?

Comrade Ford: Well, Mikhail Sergeyich, news is good. Every day we are setting new record for stay of Soviet army in Afghanistan.

G: But comrade, are we winning struggle against imperialism?

F: Our estimate demonstrates we have decisively eliminated all imperialists. Remaining is only handful of lackeys--and footnotes from Foreign Ministry.

G: How many lackeys our community estimates?

F: Community? What is community, Mikhail Sergeyich? I am community.

G: How many imperialists please?

F: Well, just a few million Mikhail Sergeyich. Some in Kabul, some in Pakistan, some in villages, some in cities. Our Key Judgment clearly notes this is proof of your wise and glorious leadership, Mikhail Sergeyich, to scatter imperialists like, like wheat before swine.

G: But overhead shows we are confronting serious internal contradictions in Afghanistan, Comrade.

F: Last satellite was politically unreliable, Mikhail Sergeyich. We had to liquidate it.

G: What? In era of greater openness? Of greater glasnost?

F: Mikhail Sergeyich, last satellite we stole from Americans. You cannot trust. New satellite from Bulgaria shows no imperialists left in Afghanistan. Is triumph of socialist research and development.

G: But I want more openness in estimates comrade. Where is glasnost? Creativity? I hear American estimates have secret new slogan for success -- what is phrase?

F: We have stolen new American intelligence slogan, Mikhail Sergeyich. In English it is "so-what?" We are not certain how to use phrase, but believe it is designed to ensure deeper thinking, harder work, deeper loyalty.

G: Good comrade Ford. But how we use slogan?

F: My suggestion Mikhail Sergeyich: Next time someone reports to you Comrade Chairman - American Imperialists have just bombed Tripoli - you say so-what?

So it is that Hal's secret formula for success in Estimates has been stolen away from us. But it will live on in the hearts of those of us left here to critique further foibles of Washington.

In all seriousness, Hal's unquenchable desire to dig further, look again, think it over, reconsider, etc., has led to a tremendous rigorousness of thinking. I have been affected by it as well as all my colleagues. Hal has enjoyed an exceptionally clear vision of how to think about intelligence, how to write it and get to the bottom of what it's all about. His red pen can only be compared to the scythe of the avenging angel.

Pop-psychology aside - I'm sure that everyone who knows Hal personally knows that he is a prince of a man, a scholar and a gentleman. With anything less than this, Hal's demanding editorial standards might have caused revolt in the ranks. But he has shown not only keen interest in making the Estimative process the best that it can be -- but he has never once lost his intense personal concern for all of his co-workers at every level. Hal has successfully mixed SDI with salt-water taffy for his secretary; strategic arms control with personally crafted outrageous ditties for someone's farewell party, Qadhafi with a personalized presentation of a promotion award.

We will miss Hal intensely, but are comforted by the fact that he will probably never give it all up entirely and will be back periodically to share his thoughts with us on all that we do. Let's toast to Hal Ford, his contributions to us, to his future work and to his family.